

FIRST RECORD OF THE SORA IN THE STATE OF HAWAII

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The Sora (*Porzana carolina*) is the most common and widely distributed member of the rail family in North America. It breeds as far north as Alaska and Canada's Northwest Territories and winters as far south as Guyana and central Peru (AOU 1998, Melvin and Gibbs 1996). Long-distance vagrancy and dispersal to remote lands is widespread in rails (Taylor 1998). This paper reports the first Sora confirmed in the Hawaiian Islands and briefly reviews other records of rails in the islands. While the occurrence of *Porzana* rails in Hawaii could be expected, on the basis of the fossil record, surprisingly, this report is the first documentation of a vagrant of this genus in the Hawaiian chain.

On 4 September 2000, at 07:00, I found a single Sora at Keahole Point, 10.8 km northwest of Kailua-Kona on the island of Hawaii. The site was a 0.69-ha settling basin excavated from a recent lava flow. I observed the bird for 20 minutes at close range with a 56× Nikon ED fieldscope. The angle of the morning sun produced ideal lighting conditions. The bird was similar in size to an adjacent Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*). It foraged at the edge of a patch of makai sedge (*Bolboschoenus maritimus*) on the eastern exposure of a mudflat, cautiously weaving in and out of view, and retreated back into the sedges as the morning sun exposed the flats. At 06:50 on 15 September Reginald E. and Susan David and I resighted the Sora about 15 m south of its original location. Reginald E. David videotaped the bird as it actively foraged, preened, twitched, and crept out over aquatic plants, strategically placing its feet and long toes to keep afloat, typical Sora behavior. It fed on whole white egg sacs (later identified as those of *Trichocorixa reticulata*, water boatman) attached to the undersides of submerged makai sedge leaves and rootstocks, also on small spiders, moths, and likely midges and aquatic beetles. At 07:15 on 22 September Anthony J. McCafferty and I observed the Sora again in the same area. The bird was last seen actively foraging on a mudflat at the edge of a patch of swollen fingergrass (*Chloris barbata*). We noted no bands or injuries and heard no vocalizations.

The plumage characteristics of this bird indicate an adult Sora in definitive basic plumage with freshly molted wing feathers and some unusual markings (Figure 1). Peter Pyle of Point Reyes Bird Observatory in California made the species, age, and plumage determinations from the videotape in the Hawaii Rare Bird Photo file at Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, Honolulu (HRBP VT02). The Eurasian rails were ruled out mainly because of the larger size and amount of black on the face of the Kona bird. Both the Little Crake (*P. parva*) and Baillon's Crake (*P. pusilla*) lack black on the face and have black and white barred undertail coverts. The Spotted Crake (*P. porzana*) differs from Sora in its overall spotted appearance and red at the base of the bill (Taylor 1998). The eye color and lack of juvenal plumage on the Kona bird identified it as an adult. The iris is red in the adult Sora, whereas it is brown in a first-fall bird.

Of about 100 Sora specimens at the California Academy of Sciences, San Francisco, Pyle found that all first-fall birds in early September had retained some of the juvenal buff or brown in the eyeline, auriculars, and breast, whereas some adults at this time had molted into winter plumage, resembling the Kona bird but typically having more black on the throat. The throat plumage was odd for an adult, possibly because the bird encountered a light regime different from that in its usual range. Light changes in regions where local cues to hormonal and molt cycles diverge from normal cues may lead to atypical plumages. The early acquisition of basic plumage and the odd throat pattern suggest that this bird may have been in Hawaii for more than a year (P. Pyle pers. comm.).



Figure 1. Sora at Keahole Point near Kailua-Kona, Hawaii. 15 September 2000.

Photo by R. E. David

Rallids are well represented on oceanic islands, showing their powers of dispersal (Slikas et al. 2002, Taylor 1998). Accidental Sora records outside the Americas are predominantly the result of eastward movement across the North Atlantic, to Greenland, the British Isles, Spain, France, Sweden, and Morocco (Melvin and Gibbs 1996). Casual records of the Sora for the Pacific basin are from east-central Alaska, the Queen Charlotte Islands (AOU 1998), and the Galapagos Islands (Castro and Phillips 1996).

In the Hawaiian Islands, records of vagrants of this family are rare and were previously limited to one hypothetical record of the Sora, and one specimen and 5 to 12 observations of the American Coot (*Fulica americana*). Many of the American Coot records, however, are uncertain because of lack of information on variation in the Hawaiian Coot (*F. alai*) (R. L. Pyle unpubl. data). On 10 February 1992 Peter Donaldson (pers. comm.) sighted a probable Sora on the Waipio Peninsula of Oahu. He had the bird in view for about 10 seconds and made a substantial but unsuccessful effort to relocate it. On 20 November 2003 Kurt Pohlman and Donaldson (pers. comm.) reported another Sora at the Kii Unit of the James Campbell National Wildlife Refuge on Oahu.

The fossil record for the Hawaiian chain contains at least 13 endemic species of the family Rallidae. Twelve of these are of the genus *Porzana*, and all are believed to have been derived from multiple arrivals from Asia (eastward) of the widespread Eurasian Baillon's Crake, Ruddy-breasted Crake (*P. fusca*), and Spotless Crake (*P. tabuensis*). All 12 *Porzana* rails became flightless and are now extinct (Olson and James 1991, Slikas et al. 2002). Two of these, the Laysan Rail (*P. palmeri*) and Hawaiian Rail (*P. sandwichensis*), perished in historic times (AOU 1998). Today, two endemic Hawaiian rallids persist. Both are recent colonists of the Hawaiian Islands (Fleischer and McIntosh 2001), the endangered Hawaiian Coot and endangered Hawaiian Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus sanduicensis*). The Hawaiian Coot is the only species of extant rail whose remains have been recovered in the Hawaiian Islands (Slikas et al. 2002).

NOTES

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